REEL HARLEM – P6 • WNBA SOARS – P7 • J.D. VANCE, EXPLAINED – P15

the indypendent
#289: August/September 2021

DAVID HOLLENBACH

FLIPPED!

HOW TO DECODE THE RACIST SPEW THAT WILL BE UNLEASHED AGAINST KAMALA HARRIS

BY NICHOLAS POWERS — P8

the indypendent

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Aug/Sep

ALL THAT JAZZ: *The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival will be held at Marcus Garvey Park (8/23–8/24) and Tompkins Square Park (8/25).*

THRU OCT 21 • PAY-WHAT-YOU-WISH
LINEAGES: KOREAN ART AT THE MET
In celebration of the 25th anniversary of The Met's Arts of Korea gallery, *Lineages: Korean Art at The Met* showcases highlights of the Museum's collection paired with important international loans of Korean modern and contemporary art.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
1000 5th Ave
MNHTN

THRU FEB 2025 • FREE
EXHIBITION: JIMMY! GOD'S BLACK REVOLUTIONARY MOUTH
The Schomburg Center is home to James Baldwin's archives and is showcasing selections from his papers – spanning his entire life and career – for the first time. This exhibition, part of The New York Public Library's celebration of Baldwin's centennial birthday, also features items from other collections that showcase his passion and brilliance.
SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd
MNHTN

SAT & SUN THRU SEP 15 • 2PM • FREE
THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY STREET THEATER SUMMER TOUR
The Socialization of a Social Worker or The Fight for Social Justice will tour New York City's five boroughs, performing in parks, playgrounds and closed streets until Sep 15. This original production tells the story of a humanitarian case worker finding hope and strength through collective action. For more, see theaterforthenewcity.net or call 212-254-1109.

SAT AUG 17 • 5–10PM • FREE
CELEBRATE BROOKLYN: LILA IKÈ | BOB MARLY: ONE LOVE | LAILA! | DJ SWEET V
BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! is hosting a pop-up event at Brower Park. The event will include a screening of the biographical film *Bob Marley: One Love* and performances by modern reggae artists Lila Iké, Laila! and DJ Sweet V.
BROWER PARK
Brooklyn Ave &, Prospect Pl
BKLYN

AUG 23-25 • 3–8PM • FREE
CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival is an annual salute to the legendary saxophonist in the neighborhoods where he lived and worked. Each year, some of the most prominent jazz musicians in the world come together to honor "The Bird" for his musical genius and contributions to jazz amongst other genres.
MARCUS GARVEY PARK 8/23–24
TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK 8/25
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MON AUG 26 • 8PM • FREE
SCREENING: DANIEL CATÁN'S *FLORENCIA EN EL AMAZONAS*
Catán's enchanting opera, inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's magical realist novels, follows a South American opera diva's Amazonian journey as she travels by boat through Brazil. The Met's 15th Summer HD Festival features performances from the company's Live in HD series of cinema transmissions. 3,000 seats in front of the opera house and additional standing room around Lincoln Center Plaza. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 55 minutes.
THE METROPOLITIAN OPERA
30 Lincoln Center
MNHTN

MON SEP 2 • ALL DAY • FREE
WEST INDIAN DAY PARADE
The West Indian Day Parade is an annual celebration of Caribbean culture in New York City. The parade draws crowds in the hundreds of thousands as it winds through Crown Heights along Eastern Parkway. The day features food, dancing, music, drinks and stunning mas bands.
IN FRONT OF BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Pkwy
BKLYN

FRI SEP 6 • 7:20PM • $17
FILM / Q&A: *LOOK INTO MY EYES*
Look Into my Eyes offers an intimate glimpse into the world of New York City psychics and their clients, exploring themes of human connection, loneliness and emotional healing through a series of revealing readings. The film's director and writer, Lana Wilson, will be answering questions following the screening.
FILM FORUM
209 West Houston St.
MNHTN

FRI SEP 7 • 10AM • FREE
LABOR DAY PARADE
Join the New York City Central Labor Council for their annual parade. Thousands of workers from over 200 union locals will join together to celebrate the power of organized labor across the workforce. Festivities will march north through *Midtown on Fifth Avenue.*
44th Street & Fifth Avenue
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SEP 7, OCT 5 • 4–10PM • FREE
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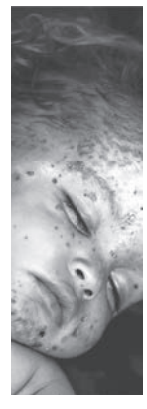
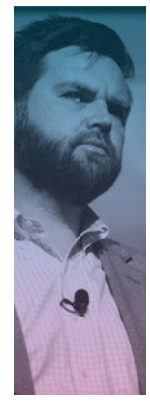

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NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

GETTING AROUND: *The loss of congestion pricing revenues has already led to cuts in MTA bus service.*

EARLY 2024 HAS MOST TRAFFIC DEATHS IN 10 YEARS

More people were killed in vehicle collisions in the first six months of 2024 than in the first half of any year since the city's Vision Zero program began in 2014, according to an analysis from Transportation Alternatives and Families for Safe Streets released July 23. The groups said that 127 people, including 61 pedestrians and 51 motorists, had died in "traffic violence." Transportation Alternatives cited the "deadly consequences" of SUVs and pickup trucks, which fatally struck 43 pedestrians and nine bicyclists. To improve safety, they advocate congestion pricing in Manhattan, building safety infrastructure such as protected bike lanes, and "daylighting" intersections (banning parking close to corners to increase visibility). Another issue is reckless driving: The city had 186 drivers last year who got more than 100 tickets for driving more than 10 miles per hour over the speed limit, according to New York University researchers.

TWO GROUPS SUE TO REVIVE CONGESTION PRICING

Two lawsuits seeking to void Gov. Kathy Hochul's June decision to stop the implementation of congestion pricing in New York City were filed July 25. One, by the City Club of New York, argues that Hochul violated the 2019 MTA Reform and Traffic Mobility Act, which authorized the program, because that law gave decision-making power to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, not the governor. The second, by the Riders Alliance, Sierra Club and the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, says that Hochul's decision violates both the state law mandating that it reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030, and the state constitution's amendment that established the right to clean air and a healthy environment. The governor "singlehandedly deprived millions of subway and bus riders of $15 billion worth of transit improvements," New York City Comptroller Brad Lander, who helped organize the litigation, said in a statement. Meanwhile, on July 18, a Manhattan State Supreme Court judge temporarily barred the MTA from cutting bus service in response to a suit by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams and Transport Workers Union Local 100.

BRAD LANDER ANNOUNCES MAYORAL RUN

City Comptroller Brad Lander announced July 30 that he is running for mayor, becoming the third candidate to challenge scandal-clouded incumbent Eric Adams in next year's Democratic primary. "We can replace a leader when they fail the basic tests of the job," Lander said, citing the high costs of housing and child care. Lander, from Brooklyn's brownstone belt, joins former comptroller Scott Stringer of Manhattan and pro-tenant state Senator Zellnor Myrie of Brooklyn in the race. All three are running to Adams' left politically, but ranked-choice voting could likely prevent them from splitting the progressive vote. Socialist Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani (D-Queens) is also eyeing the race, and disgraced former governor Andrew Cuomo might jump in too if Adams is indicted or drops out.

ROCKAWAY BIRDS ATTACK NYPD DRONES

It could be a scene out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie. Angry birds at Rockaway Beach are attacking NYPD flying drones. The drones, deployed over city beaches after several people drowned this summer, are used to detect sharks in the water and swimmers in distress — but oystercatchers, shorebirds with a distinctive orange bill who nest at Rockaway, have been observed flying next to the drones, squawking and trying to kick them, ornithologist Shiloh Schulte told *The New York Times*. "Oystercatchers, in particular, are very defensive of their young, and they see drones as real predators for themselves or their chicks," Dr. Schulte said. "They think the drones are some form of raptor." The city's beaches have had a shortage of lifeguards for years, and most of the drownings happened after 6 p.m., when the lifeguarding shifts end.

JUSTICE FOR SOME: *The New York Courthouse in Lower Manhattan.*

It's Giuliani time!

Mayor Adams tries to recycle Rudy's top deputy as city's lead lawyer

By Theodore Hamm

Few events shocked New York City quite like the Abner Louima assault. In August 1997 at the 70th Precinct in East Flatbush, NYPD officer Justin Volpe sodomized Abner Louima, a Haitian immigrant, with a broomstick.

Normally a reflexive defender of the police, Mayor Rudy Giuliani visited Louima twice in the hospital and pushed for a full investigation. It was an election year.

Soon after the incident, Giuliani appointed a 28-member task force to address police-community relations. According to Village Voice legend Wayne Barrett, the combative mayor thereby called attention to "systemic problems he'd never before acknowledged."

In late March 1998 the task force issued a lengthy report with dozens of recommendations. Now in his second term, Giuliani scoffed at the report's significant proposals (e.g. a city residence requirement for cops), accepting only a minor one — changing the NYPD's use of "community affairs" to "community relations." In Barrett's view, Rudy had turned the Louima task force into "a joke."

The mayor had at least one notable defender, however: Randy Mastro. Current Mayor Eric Adams, who has a dubious track record regarding NYPD accountability, recently nominated Mastro to serve as the city's corporation counsel overseeing the Law Department.

As noted by The New York Times mainstay Dan Barry, Mastro — Giuliani's deputy mayor for operations — claimed that Rudy's "dismissive response" to the task force was appropriate. "The Mayor was underwhelmed by the report and rightly so," insisted Mastro.

The deputy mayor further stated that the Louima report did not provide recommendations on how the community could improve its approach to the police. Police Commissioner Howard Safir, not known as a reformer, was more charitable, saying that the report would be "looked at and analyzed."

In his effort to win City Council support for his bid to become corporation counsel, Mastro recently sat down with longtime WCBS reporter Marcia Kramer, who praised his "incredible credentials." Not surprisingly, neither mentioned Louima nor any of the police accountability controversies during the Giuliani era.

Mastro instead emphasized that he is "a lifelong Democrat" who helped the Giuliani administration push through progressive same-sex domestic partnership legislation. He pledges to use the Law Department to advance civil rights and social justice initiatives.

The Adams administration is touting Mastro's support from many leading figures in the legal world, including ex-Obama AG Loretta Lynch and from Giuliani foes, including former Public Advocate Mark Green. Norman Siegel, an Adams ally who frequently sued the Giuliani administration in his capacity as head of the NYCLU, also supports Mastro.

Siegel worked with Mastro in their legal challenge to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's successful bid to overturn term limits in 2008. "Randy is an excellent lawyer and a mentor to younger lawyers, which is helpful in this type of position," Siegel tells The Indypendent.

A member of the Louima task force, Siegel nonetheless says that he disagrees with Mastro's hostility toward the group's findings. "In general," observes Siegel, "I'm not sure what his position is on police misconduct."

"Mastro has spent many decades as a tool of both Rudy Giuliani and the very worst of corporate America," veteran defense attorney Ron Kuby tells The Indy. In private practice, Mastro's clients included Chevron in its crusade against human rights lawyer Steven Donziger, whom Kuby represented.

"Giving Mastro government authority would turn the City of New York into a subsidiary of Big Law," Kuby says, referencing the country's most powerful corporate law firms.

On a more micro level, it's possible that Adams may expect his new corporation counsel to allow the City to represent the mayor and/or his associates in sexual-harassment lawsuits. This was reportedly a point of contention that led to the departure of Adams' initial corporation counsel, former Brooklyn judge Sylvia Hinds-Radix.

In Siegel's view, the Law Department "should not represent any city officials accused of misconduct that falls outside of their official duties." How the department handles claims against the NYPD also can either help reveal or conceal police misbehavior.

The Indy asked Mastro to explain how he would approach police misconduct and whether his office would defend Adams or others accused of non-official wrongdoing. Mastro opted not to respond.

Meanwhile, Mayor Adams recently claimed that he deserved an "A++" for his handling of police accountability.

The City Council is expected to decide whether Mastro will indeed become the city's top lawyer by the middle of September.

ADAMS MAY EXPECT MASTRO TO ALLOW THE CITY TO REPRESENT THE MAYOR AND/OR HIS ASSOCIATES IN SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAWSUITS.

SUE BRISK

Keeping it reel

"People come to Maysles as strangers and leave as family," says new head of Harlem's only arthouse movie theater

By John Tarleton

On Malcolm X Boulevard in the heart of Harlem, Maysles Documentary Center is housed in a small storefront building with a sign above the front door that lists upcoming movie screenings.

When I recently met with the center's new executive director Kazembe Balagun, he spoke excitedly about the youth trainings held downstairs as he guided me past the popcorn stand and into a small, 50-seat movie theater that feels like an enlarged version of a living room. Balagun then stepped behind the big screen at the front of the room. As he pushed against the wall behind the screen, it swung open — Batman style — and revealed a brightly lit room with several thick wooden desks that he and other Maysles staffers work from. On one of the desks sat a camera once used by the pioneering documentarian Albert Maysles.

"The great thing about working here is I'm at street level," Balagun says of his position. "Anytime I step outside, I can have a conversation with our neighbors and really get a pulse of the community, and that informs a lot of our programming."

Balagun is a longtime community organizer and cultural curator; he previously worked as the education director at the old Brecht Forum and as a project manager at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. I've known him for more than 20 years and was delighted to learn that this widely respected figure on the New York left would now be positioned to make a big impact from his new perch at the intersection of film, activism and social movements. So I made my way up to Harlem to see what he was thinking.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

THE INDYPENDENT: Talk about growing up in Harlem.

KAZEMBE BALAGUN: I learned how to swim at Jackie Robinson Pool on 145th Street. I did my first research project at Macombs Dam Library. I remember Liberation Books used to be near here. For me, Harlem was always a small southern village come up north. People were politically savvy, sweet and smart. We knew there was a larger world out there, and a Black world as well.

Is Harlem still a Black cultural mecca? Or has gentrification sapped its cultural creativity?

Harlem is still very much the voice of Black America. For a long time you had a "majoritarian consciousness" in Harlem of being a Black majority on top of Manhattan. That concentration of Black folks gave our churches, our civic organizations, our radical organizations a sense of being a center of deep democratic yearning and reform in this country. That was something that was widely expressed. You also always had a vibrant gay community, a vibrant Muslim community.

Fast forward to the late '90s and 2000s, and you see an influx of white folks. You can put in a Whole Foods or a Church of Latter Day Saints and say we lost Harlem. But I think what this moment calls for is a reappraisal of that deep democratic coalition that is built around justice, that harkens back to the past while being both multicultural and Black at the same time. Harlem attracts people who are progressive-minded and want to be here for a reason. Whether you're white or Black or other, you have to deal with the fact that Harlem is tremendously over-policed and under-resourced. There's high maternal mortality rates, high asthma rates, no bike lanes. There's so many different ways Harlem is under-resourced.

What role can an art-house cinema like Maysles play?

We're going to continue to be a place of education where people can participate without money being an issue, a place where people can gather, debate — have good conversations based on good, wholesome information.

What makes Maysles special?

There's a couple of things. One, there's a multiracial community that respects and champions Black people. Also, we have a knowledgeable staff from the film curators to the projectionists, to the popcorn vendors.

Right now the process of movie production is entirely controlled by the 1%. Multinational companies like Amazon or Apple are controlling our desires and dreams. You can get caught up in the fantasy of watching a film.

The 1% wants us to focus on our screens. The goal of people's artists is to look at the screen and also get people to look and "see" each other. We have a saying: People come to Maysles as strangers and leave as family.

MOVIES, BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE: *Kazembe Balgun, executive director of the Maysles Documentary Center.*

What do you mean when you say that Maysles is creating a people's democratic film culture?

With the films we screen; we are turning our audience into critics — and critics into artists. We are creating the basis for social reproduction of thought from the ground level up — so you take these tools and apply them to your own community. The thing about microcinema is that you can replicate it anywhere. You can have five seats in your living room, and that's a microcinema. In the old school in poor countries, there might have been only one movie camera in the whole country, and the whole national liberation movement would have to use that one movie camera and share that. So if you have one camera in your whole neighborhood, that can be the basis for a unit to create a film. You are talking about the pooling of resources. The resources are not just technology though, but the people themselves.

What is it about watching movies that is special?

When you see a movie, you're just laying back and allowing someone to tell a story. Your blood pressure goes down. Your heart rate goes down. If you're in a theater, not in front of your computer, it's even better. You get to relax with other people. You don't realize it, but you all are breathing in harmony. You're sharing a communal breath together, and that's a powerful thing.

What kind of films do you want to screen?

I want to hit as many notes as possible. I want to have politically challenging films. I want to have contemporary films. I want to have avant-garde films. I also want to connect films to impacted communities. I want to start having kids' days. I want to have family days. And in the summer I want to continue to have outdoor screenings, so people can have that communal experience together. We'll also continue to do film festivals. We just wrapped up our Harlem international film festival. Our Black Panther Film Festival is in October.

See www.maysles.org for more.

JOHN TARLETON

JOHN TARLETON

Give me Liberty

NYC team chases first championship as WNBA soars in popularity

By John Tarleton & Ariana Orozco

It was the closing minutes of a hard-fought Sunday afternoon basketball game at the Barclays Center. The crowd of more than 10,000 fans chanted their team's name — "Lib-er-ty! Lib-er-ty! Liberty!" — as they waved teal-colored towels with the image of the team's beloved mascot Ellie the Elephant.

"They are rushing too much when they don't have too," a fan said, shaking his head after another Liberty turnover.

With 1:31 left in the fourth quarter, Sabrina Ionescu, one of the team's stars, drove to the basket and sank a floating jump shot over a taller opponent to give the Liberty a one-point lead over the Washington Mystics. The Liberty pulled away in the last minute. When the final buzzer goes off, the crowd let out a roar to celebrate their team's 93-88 victory, its seventh in a row.

• • •

The WNBA, now in its 28th season, is surging in popularity thanks in part to its most famous rookie Caitlin Clark (more about her later), but also due to many years of patiently nurturing the most progressive and LGBTQ+-heavy fan base of any professional sports league in the United States.

"There's so many queer people here," said Alysaa, a queer white woman in her early 30s. "It's literally the biggest queer block party in Brooklyn."

For Rylee and her son Robby, it was their first WNBA game. She said they were inspired by the media coverage of this year's NCAA women's college basketball tournament in which Clark carried the Iowa Hawkeyes to the finals for a second year in a row only to come up one win short.

"My son loves basketball, but I want him to love all of the sport — not just when he sees men playing it," Rylee said.

No one dunks in the WNBA or plays above the rim. To score points, its players have to constantly move without the ball and set each other up with nimble passes.

"It's like male and female gymnastics in that way," Rylee explained. "It's the same sport, but we're testing different skills."

For Amiri and R.J., a pair of teenage basketball fans, affordable tickets are part of the draw.

"This is cheaper than the NBA," Amiri said. "Shit, this is cheaper than cornbread."

"I think it's really important to support our women," R.J. chimed in. "We got mothers, sisters and they can play, you know?"

The New York Liberty was founded in 1997 as one of the WNBA's eight original franchises.

ACCESSIBLE: *Marquesha Davis of the New York Liberty poses with some of her younger fans who gathered on the backside of the Barclays Center to greet players when they left the arena.*

FANS: *(Left to right) Miller, Gabby and Merit are members of the New York Liberty's large LGBTQ+ fanbase.*

The team was owned by New York Knicks owner James Dolan, and it played at Madison Square Garden before Dolan banished it to White Plains, New York, where the Knicks' developmental league team plays. In 2019, the Brooklyn Nets, the NBA's other New York City franchise, bought the Liberty and moved it to its current home.

Landing in the heart of Brooklyn allowed the team to rebuild its fanbase. In 2021, the team rolled out Ellie the Elephant, the team mascot who has 100,000 Instagram followers and whose dance moves inspire intense Reddit debates among fans about the identity of the person underneath the costume.

"Obviously this is a huge queer space," said Gabby. "It's nice that you know like 40 people every game. All of your friends are here. You know you can be here and be yourself."

"They don't just tolerate us; they embrace us," Gabby's friend Merit said of the WNBA.

Gabby, Merit and a third friend, Miller, have been season ticket holders since 2021. They watched the team reverse its losing ways and make it to the finals last year before losing to the Las Vegas Aces. They have also enjoyed watching the queer-friendly scene around the team grow.

When Caitlin Clark's name comes up, they roll their eyes. They acknowledge that Clark, with her long-distance shooting and razzle-dazzle passing, is talented. But, they add, it's impossible to ignore that Clark's popularity is fueled in part by her being straight and white in a league where most of the players are Black and many are openly queer.

"There were so many great players before her." Gabby pointed to A'ja Wilson, a two-time league MVP with the Las Vegas Aces who does not have any corporate endorsement deals. "That was definitely partly because she's Black, queer and more masculine," Gabby said. "Everyone is like, '[Clark] saved the league; she saved the league,' when we don't need saving!" Miller said.

• • •

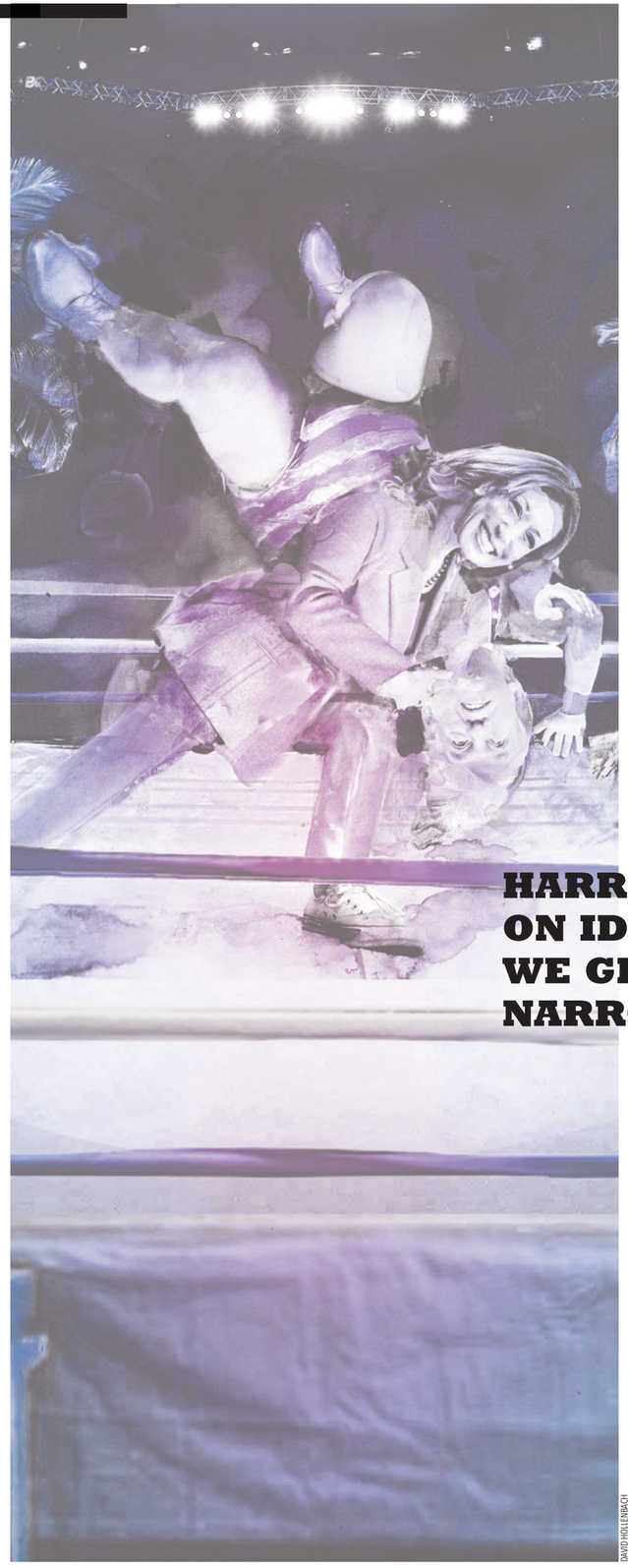
The WNBA attendance is its highest in more than 20 years. Demands for the jerseys of Clark and her top college rival Angel Reese have contributed to a 236% increase in merchandise sales. And the league recently inked a new 11-year, $2.2 billion television deal worth six times its prior contract. It remains to be seen if the league will go the way of a hip, low-rent neighborhood that becomes gentrified and loses the qualities that made it special.

After a month-long break for the Olympics, the Liberty's regular season resumes from August 15 to September 19, followed by the league's playoffs. The team starts the second half of the season with the best record in the WNBA (21-4) and, its loyal fans believe, a good chance at winning its first-ever championship.

Kamala's path to victory

Why the Dems' surprise nominee must lean into an agenda that addresses the concerns of America's multiracial working class

By Nicholas Powers



DAVID HOLLENBACH

Kamala Harris can kick Trump's ass. Like devastate him. Imagine she's Chun Li from Street Fighter and does a spinning bird kick. She'll say, "He's a felon. He'll sign a national abortion ban. He'll give tax breaks to the rich." The hits make Trump woozy. Stars circle his head. Wham!

But there's a catch. She can't campaign as a centrist Democrat, waving her identity as a Black woman to sell reformist policy. She can't repeat Obama or Hillary. To win and win big, Harris has to campaign like Bernie Sanders.

Why? To get older, white, working-class voters who feel betrayed onto her side. To win over non-voters who see the system as rigged. Why? The goal is larger than winning the election. The goal is to stop the rise of fascism. Choosing Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz (see page 10) as her running mate is a good start. But Harris has to go further and champion Bernie's economic populism.

Trump and the Republicans will hurl every racist and sexist label at Harris. "America" being what it is, they'll stick. Harris represents a racially diverse, metropolitan future that scares some working-class whites and alienated men. She has to define herself as their ally not their enemy.

The question is not whether Harris can win. She can. Run on identity, abortion and democracy, and we get a coin-flip election between a narrow victory or loss. Run on a working-class program, and she hits the jackpot.

The contest is not between Trump and Harris. It's between Harris the centrist and Harris the populist.

NAIL-BITING TO NOVEMBER

We're at the crossroads. You can feel it. The air is electric. Will the nation vote for Trump? Will his grip on us tighten like a murderer's hands? If so, expect a national abortion ban. Expect even more violent policing of peaceful protests. And an all-out assault on unions.

Or will the nation vote for the first Black woman president? Will progressives have some breathing space to organize and protest? Will we be able to put pressure on President Harris to stop sending Israel weapons that slaughter Palestinians? Will we be able to push for national healthcare, a Green New Deal and full abortion rights?

It's a nail-biter until November. Yes, Democrats are flawed and hypocritical. Party leaders gaslit voters for years about Biden's declining health. We should have had a real primary. We needed to test the new upcomers. But right here, right now, the Democrats are the vehicle for maintaining a semblance of democracy within which civil society can push for justice.

The path to victory is through a series of obstacles. The United States has a population of 342 million; 239 million are eligible voters, and 159 million votes were cast in 2020. In that last election, the lines wove around city blocks. Panic was in the air. "Not this guy again. Not another four years of crazy." Trump got 74 million, and Biden got 81 million. I heard the news that Biden won at my Brooklyn playground. All the parents cheered.

Yet outside of our cheers were nearly 80 million Americans who did not vote. The way to protect democracy from MAGA Republicans is to wake the sleeping giant of non-voters. They are often poorer, younger and less educated than those who vote.

Nearly 53 million people in the United States work low-paying jobs. Every day they walk the cliff edge of poverty. They look at stacks of unpaid bills and sleep in cars or on friend's couches. They lose homes and jobs. Nothing they hear from Democrats or Republicans speaks to their needs.

The next obstacle is the Electoral College, which skews elections in favor of Republicans. Democrats are packed in a few big states like California and New York, where they run up lopsided victories. Republican voters are more spread out, which means your average swing state voter is to the right of the average voter nationwide. Even if a majority votes for the Democrats, like in 2020 when Biden beat Trump by more than seven million votes, they can still lose. In that election, Biden barely squeaked out an Electoral College victory. If just 43,000 voters had not pulled the lever for "Scranton Joe" in Wisconsin, Michigan and Arizona, we'd be in a second Trump term — just 43,000!

For Harris to win, she has to wring votes from both the Rust Belt and Sun Belt swing states like Georgia and Arizona. She has to get non-voters and older, white, working-class voters to roll the dice on her. She has to show up at soup kitchens and talk with workers on food stamps. She has to out-Bernie Bernie. She has to campaign on Build Back Better, Biden's signature program for helping working families that was blocked by Congress in 2021, and she has to say, "Now we can get it done!"

Harris faces another big obstacle: the story that white voters have of Black people. Already, Republicans are tapping into racist and sexist tropes. Behind "she's not smart" is the Coon image. Behind she's a "dangerous radical" is the Nat Turner caricature.

Democrats and Republicans harvest data from what we buy, what we click on and where we live in order to create a granular map of voters. Yet under that data, under the AI tracking, is an older history. It guides us like sleepwalkers following a map with our eyes closed. Written on it is centuries of racism.

THE BLACK IMAGE IN THE RACIST MIND

"What the hell have you done," J.D. Vance, Trump's vice-presidential nominee, shouted about Kamala Harris to a stadium full of MAGA supporters, "except collect a government check for the past 20 years?!" Did you hear it? Government check. She's a "lazy" Black. Harris is a glorified welfare queen.

Interviewed by CNN, Rep. Tim Burchett (R-Tenn.), called Harris a "DEI hire." MSNBC interviewed white Republican women. One said of Harris, "I think she's an idiot." Another said, "She's not real smart. That's my opinion." Hear it, now? Dumb coon.

Republicans tap into anti-Black stereotypes to spark disgust in the lizard part of the white brain. They can because racism is baked into our culture. It is how slavery was justified. How else can one clamp chains on people and sell them? You can't think they're human. That's how power works.

HARRIS CAN WIN. BUT IF SHE RUNS SOLELY ON IDENTITY, ABORTION AND DEMOCRACY, WE GET A COIN-FLIP ELECTION BETWEEN A NARROW VICTORY OR LOSS.

Arising from the economic base of slavery, white-supremacist ideology cast Africans as animals. From the "founding fathers" to white overseers, racism churned like a toxic river. Thomas Jefferson believed in it. The master in Frederick Douglass' memoir breathed it like air. Imagine him, holding money, looking at a human being shivering on an auction block and not feeling empathy because it was in his material interest to see an animal. That's ideology.

Antebellum slave owners circulated images of happy Blacks. They talked of Uncle Tom, an older desexualized Black man who worked in-house. They praised Mammy, a big, handkerchief-wearing Black woman minding the master's children. Next up was Sambo, a happy, bumbling servant. They were "good" Blacks. The false imagery was used to show that white supremacy was right by nature and God.

As the smoke of the Civil War cleared and Southern plantations lay in ruins, racists reacted to freed Black people by transforming the imagery from "good Blacks" to "bad Blacks" who endangered decent society with their animalism. The "brute" was a fearsome Black man who lusted for white women. The "jezebel" was a hypersexual Black woman who seduced decent men. The "coon" was a lazy, shiftless and disobedient Black man. "Picaninnies" were nappy, wild Black children who had reverted to a native state.

The equation is simple. When white supremacists are in power, they promote the image of "good Blacks." See how well the system works?! When scared of losing power, they suddenly see "bad Blacks" everywhere.

U.S. politicians have recycled racist imagery, Republicans especially — I mean, Jesus, they chew on it like a dog with a bone. Why? The Republican Party serves a free-market business elite that wants power but has no natural voting base for its goal of hoarding wealth. Since the late 1960s, its leaders have stoked the racial and cultural grievances of working- and middle-class whites. In their ideology, God-fearing whites must protect America from perverts, minorities and communists. The go-to villains were the brute and coon, updated as urban criminals and undeserving poor. Just listen to Lee Atwater, a Republican strategist for Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. "You start out in 1954 by saying, nigger, nigger, nigger," he breezily said. "By 1968 you can't say nigger. So, you say 'forced busing,' 'states' rights.' You're getting so abstract now that you're talking about cutting taxes."

Need evidence? Running for president in 1976, Reagan hammered the story of a welfare queen who he said "has 80 names, 30 addresses … Her tax-free income is alone is over $150,000." Do you hear it? Lazy coon. Think of Bush Sr.'s infamous 1988 Willie Horton ad that featured a Black male rapist. Pure brute. In 2012, Pat Buchanan said, "Obama is the drug dealer of welfare." Urban coon. Think House Speaker Paul Ryan 2014 saying in 2014, "We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working." Coons again.

Democrats have also tapped into anti-Black imagery. In the '90s, Hillary Clinton railed against "super predators" while her husband, President Bill Clinton, signed a crime bill that sent mass incarceration soaring.

However, liberals usually eschew "Bad Black" imagery for the"Good Black" from the Antebellum Era's Uncle Tom — but updated into the "magic negro!" You've seen the magic negro a million times. He heals white people, fixes their problems or gives absolution. Ever see The Green Mile? Or The Legend of Bagger Vance? Remember The Matrix? Unlike the Uncle Tom, the Magic Negro serves white people but keeps his dignity and independence to make the service more innocent. How does this show up in politics? Well, Obama was the magic negro of liberals.

Back to Republicans. In 2022, Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wisc.) ran a hysterical attack ad against his challenger, Mandela Barnes, a Black Democrat. It showed crime headlines and a woman's scared voice said, "That's Mandela Barnes. He's talking about releasing violent criminals … into our communities … murderers and child rapists." Not child rapists! Can you see? It is a 21st-century Willie Horton ad. Liberals will let the Brutes out! (Sing that to "Who Let the Dogs Out" by Baha Men.)

History is not without a sense of irony. The Republican playbook will be used on Republicans. Harris was a prosecutor. She can take their law-and-order rhetoric and throw it back at Trump, a felon, and the January 6th insurrectionists. The whole Proud Boys/Neo-Nazi/QAnon craziness has transformed MAGA in the eyes of many voters from "good whites" to "bad whites." Democrats can now show that Republicans have become the villains of their own playbook. They are now "white brutes."

Continued on next page

COURTESY

IN THE HUNT: *Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz.*

Mr. Walz goes to Washington

By John Tarleton

During the two weeks that Kamala Harris weighed which white guy from Middle America she wanted to join her on the presidential ticket, many progressives swooned over Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a man previously known to few outside his home state.

Suddenly, Waltz was everywhere on cable news shows using his folksy midwestern charm to skewer the Republicans as "weird."

He came with an everyman biography: Raised in a small town of 400, he was a high social studies teacher and football coach before being elected to Congress six times from a rural, Republican-leaning district.

As governor, he signed progressive legislation on abortion rights, trans rights, legal marijuana, worker rights, paid parental leave, lower childcare cost, free school meals and free public college for families making under $80,000 per year.

Walz is not a radical. And like any capitalist politician, he contains contradictions. For example, he signed climate legislation to make Minnesota carbon-free by 2040. Yet, he also had state police arrest more than 200 non-violent protesters who were blocking construction of the Enbridge Line 3 oil pipeline across indigenous Ojibwe land — the very kind of infrastructure project that will lock in fossil-fuel usage well past Walz's 2040 deadline.

Still, progressives saw someone who could effectively argue that their policies were common-sense examples of neighbors helping neighbors. Arguments for why Walz was the best VP choice filled social media. So too did denunciations of Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, a conservative Democrat with close ties to business elites in the party, who was widely seen as the frontrunner to join the ticket.

When Harris announced on Aug. 6 that she had chosen Walz, progressives were both delighted and disoriented. After decades of being left-punched by a party establishment that routinely takes their support for granted, progressives were experiencing something all too rare: victory.

"Genuinely disorienting how the democratic party keeps making smart decisions," tweeted one progressive.

"Harris choosing Tim Walz as her running mate sets a dangerous precedent that Democrats might do cool shit that voters love," tweeted another.

"Can't believe Kamala rejected all the Dem consultant class and the Joe Scarborough types to make an actually good choice," tweeted a third.

Meanwhile, Joe Scarborough, the host of MSNBC's Morning Joe news show, was also stunned. He was interviewing Andrew Ross Sorkin, star financial columnist for The New York Times, when he blurted out "I can't even begin to think what the business community is going to think about a progressive [VP pick]." Sorkin tried to comfort Scarborough, saying he was receiving a flurry of text messages from corporate CEOs who were also dismayed by Harris' choice.

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What does it all mean?

The relationship between a president and vice president tends to be awkward. The veep is expected to be ready to take over the world's most powerful political office on a moment's notice if the president is incapacitated. Yet, they must never ever show any sign of coveting their boss' job or thinking they could do it better. If she wins, Harris will be the one calling the shots, and Walz, like a proper soldier, will be expected to back both her good and bad decisions with equal enthusiasm.

How Walz beat out Shapiro for the number two spot will be analyzed for years to come. While many variables were involved, Shapiro's strident hostility toward Palestinians and their supporters very likely played a role. When he was Pennsylvania attorney general, Shapiro went after Ben & Jerry's for refusing to license their ice cream to be sold in illegal West Bank settlements. This spring, he compared campus antiwar protesters to members of the KKK.

According to a CNN report, Shapiro "had become something of a lightning rod for Gaza protests." After months of antiwar demonstrations that had split the Democratic Party, one anonymous Harris advisor said, "Nobody wanted to rip that scab back open."

Kamala Harris

Continued from previous page

FROM COPMALA TO THE QUEEN OF THE DREAM

Buzz. I checked my phone. A text came in with an image of then-Senator Kamala Harris as an exaggerated super cop. In it, she has a test-me-motherfucker police stare. In the background, she cackles while arresting a Black girl, handcuffing wrists as thin as matchsticks. I shook my head. My Black Lives Matters friends had a sharp reaction to her. She's a cop. She's down with mass incarceration. She is "the man."

That was in 2020. Now Harris's record as a prosecutor is a source of pride. A crown of destiny is being placed on Harris. Black women, Black men, LGBTQ+ people and white women, among others, are hosting Zoom calls and throwing money like a cash-grab air tube. She is seen as Obama 2.0. Another first. Another win for MLK's Dream.

How is this transformation happening? Well, if Republicans have a *Birth of a Nation* story where they are the vigilantes using violence to protect a natural order, Black America has its own deep story based in the Bible.

We are a people exiled in the Promised Land. Malcolm X said we are "lost in the wilderness of North America," freed from slavery but hounded by our enemies as we search for home. Tubman and King were two Moses figures. Malcolm X, our John the Baptist. Obama, our Joshua redeeming the dream. Now Harris is the new queen, a new redeemer.

But every hero casts a shadow. For every Malcolm X there's a poverty pimp. For every Coretta Scott King there's a MAGA hype-woman like Diamond and Silk. Between those poles are leaders who work the system but aren't down for revolution. We honor Roy Wilkins and Ella Baker. We honor A. Philip Randolph and BLM founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi. We need leaders to work the system from within. The danger: the system can work you.

It can turn you inside out and pit you against the people you claim to serve.

And we have been betrayed. We've seen "leaders" take the money and run. Our ancestors gave us a measuring tape to use; it goes from sellout to savior. To be honest, in 2020 Harris was seen as closer to the sellout side. She was a district attorney. She laughed about arresting parents who let kids be truant from school. She grudgingly came out in support of Medicare for All. She came off as more ambitious than visionary. She never really got our support.

Now that she is the Democratic candidate for president, we are bathing her in love. We transfer our hope and fear, our history on to her. It fuels her ascent from quasi-sellout to the queen of the dream.

The reality is more ambiguous.

Harris is a child of the Civil Rights Movement and the decolonial movements sweeping the globe in that era. Her mother, an Indian cancer researcher, and her father, a leftwing Jamaican economist, met and fell in love while at Berkeley in the 1960s. Harris went to her first protests in a baby stroller. She spent summers in Jamaica. She visited India. She learned about the world and its dangers. As a teen, her family took in a sexually abused friend. Maybe it taught Harris to never be vulnerable. Maybe that's why she always finds the angle — she deftly dodges obstacles to get higher positions of power.

Like Obama, Harris eschewed her parents' 1960s idealism for hard-nosed pragmatism. She did the law-school thing and leveled up as a prosecutor, then a San Francisco District Attorney in order to "change the system" from within. Harris is a highly intelligent woman who carefully triangulates. She takes liberal positions and keeps her support from the elite. On her watch, the DA's office convicted people for marijuana possession. Yet few went to prison for it. Yes, she drove an anti-truancy program that snagged a few parents. Yet the reality is the street was a conveyor belt to crime. The kids had to be in school. She did not enforce Proposition 8, a 2008 voter initiative in California that banned gay marriage.

When you trace the dots, a portrait emerges. Harris is a pragmatic liberal who knew that the first step in protecting the vulnerable was getting power and keeping it. Even if that means sacrificing progressive ideals for popular support.

Harris is a liberal. She supports abortion, affirmative action and LGBTQ+ rights. In the Senate, she pushed for six-month paid family leave. At the same time, she has long been

ADAM KAZ

Couch surfing for Kamala

I plan to put my love of canvassing to good use

By Nancy Romer

I'm a retired Brooklyn College professor, a grandparent and a union and climate organizer. I've been involved in leftist political organizing for more than 50 years, and I must say that I (mostly) love doing the work. I feel connected to the world and its future in profound ways, and I keep meeting fabulous people who are also committed to the work. My focus changes over time, but the basics of working for a just and sustainable world are constant.

Of course we are in a crisis! Climate change, economic inequality, attempts to roll back past victories against racism and sexism, as well as global crises, are brewing up a storm. Of course Kamala Harris and Tim Walz won't save the world, but they will protect it way more than their opponents. Their election may give climate protection a fighting chance. They are likely to support workers, women and people of color more than any administration in U.S. history. And they are way better powerbrokers to organize against than the Republicans. I'm delighted to be able to join their campaign and work for their election and the down-ballot candidates running with them. I wish there were a truly leftist and viable party but, alas, there is not.

I've canvassed a lot over the years: for third party candidates in the early '70s and for Kerry, Obama, Biden and lots of local races since then. I like canvassing because you meet people, hear their stories and learn how they frame issues. I don't get to initiate a conversation at most of the doors, but when I do, I usually start by asking the person what the most important issues to them in the particular election are. I can usually riff off their starting point, make a human connection, share some of my thoughts — but mostly I learn from them. I love checking out their porches, their apartment buildings, their kids, the playgrounds, the local stores. The further away the community is from my own experience, the more I enjoy canvassing and the more I learn. I love getting out of my bubble and discovering over and over that most people are good and interesting.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION: *Door-to-door canvassing is one of the most effective ways to reach undecided voters.*

This year I plan to spend all of October canvassing across the Midwest in some of the "swing states." I went to grad school and did politics in the Midwest in the early '70s, so I have lots of friends with whom I can stay (though not more than four nights each). I plug in to the local AFL-CIO canvassing operation wherever I am. I know that working people — and that's the demographic I am usually assigned to canvass — need to have conversations on what differences the Democrats and the Republicans have on offer. Because the Democrats are such poor communicators, many people need to know the differences in the policies of the two parties and how it will affect them in their daily lives. Put me in a working-class community and I'll connect around unions, work and family.

You can join the canvassing and voter turnout operations of many different groups, even if you can only go on day trips outside of New York City. Philadelphia, the largest city in the largest swing state, is only 100 miles away. There are also several competitive congressional districts in the suburbs outside New York City that need to be turned "blue" in order to flip control of the House of Representatives to the Democrats. The Harris-Walz team is highly imperfect. They are not leftists, for sure. But they give us a chance at survival and an opportunity to keep trying our best to turn the tide toward a just and safe world. Let's put our collective shoulders to the wheel and make it happen!

Here are some organizations that you can connect with to canvas, make phone calls and send out postcards: Working Families Party, Stand Up Pennsylvania, AFL-CIO, Seed the Vote and Movement Voter Project.

Nancy Romer, professor emerita, Brooklyn College, CUNY, is a lifelong activist. She is presently on the executive council of the Professional Staff Congress of CUNY (AFT), the union local that represents 30,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York, and co-chairs its Environmental Justice Working Group. She's lived in Brooklyn for over 50 years.

THE VIEW FROM THE LEFT

friendly with Silicon Valley — her brother-in-law and top advisor Tony West is the chief legal officer at Uber — and many of her former aides have gone onto lucrative corporate lobbying gigs. They might pop up in a Harris administration asking for corporate favors. And her official campaign website doesn't mention her position on a single issue.

Harris is not the "leftwing lunatic" Republicans see. Nor is she the "queen of the dream" Democrats hallucinate. Yet the sight of the first Black woman president will have a powerful effect. It means a Black girl, maybe Afro-Latina in the Bronx, maybe a Black girl alone in a white neighborhood in Illinois, or a Haitian woman crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, sees Harris in the White House and knows she can be powerful too. Not just powerful; but can bring her long journey to tell the world — the running from gangs, the endless night work, the mopping floors and breathing chemicals, the glass ceiling at work, the false dreams sold everywhere, the men lying to her, the men hurting her, the healing that took too long. All of it.

Harris has become a symbol, and it has eclipsed her messy humanity. Symbols can be North Stars for a new generation. A Black girl whose name no one knows sees her star, and when she arrives, so does the future we need.

Who wins the election depends on which Harris shows up. At this point, it's not about Trump anymore. Trump is Trump. He's an aging alpha ape, making fascist word salads on live TV. He hates losing, especially to Black women. The more he falls in the polls, the crazier he'll get. Watch for the doom spiral.

If Harris the centrist shows up, we might lose. If she doubles-down on identity, she'll lose. The greatest risk to her campaign wold be her becoming a symbol to the older, white working class of the multi-cultural, late-stage capitalism that left them behind. They don't believe they have a home in the future with its fluid identities — fluid language and capital. Fluid technology. Fluid pronouns. Fluid fashions and music. Fluid diets. Fluid moralities from polyamory to New Age woo-woo. Fluid West Coast and East Coast cities whose elites look down from jet windows at those stuck in small towns.

If Harris the populist champions something like a revived Build Back Better or a Green New Deal combined with a law-and-order campaign against Trump and company, it's a done deal. The millions of new jobs would anchor Americans spinning in the vortex of capitalism. The pride in building new wind turbines and new electric cars would transform the worldview of a generation. Dangling that vision in front of the white working class in the swing states can peel enough of them away from Trump to win big.

Economic populism restores order for those on the edge of poverty, which means a Harris campaign has to be creative. She can't let herself be defined as the "bad Black," the "leftwing lunatic" by Republicans. She also can't be defined as the "good Black" by liberals, who already are pushing her to be the magic negro, the female version of the Uncle Tom, aka the mammy-cop who will protect and serve them. An icky version of this came into view during an interview with Drew Barrymore, who leaned way too close to Harris and said, "We need you to be Momala to the country."

No, we don't need "Momala." We need Harris to be what Black women have always been in our families, in our churches, in our neighborhoods: leaders. Harris the populist has to fight Kamala the centrist, who is deep in the back pocket of Wall Street and Silicon Valley billionaires. The mega-rich pour money into her campaign and expect a return on that investment. Already Harris has reversed popular liberal positions she took in her 2020 presidential campaign to steer to the dead center. She was against fracking, now she's for it. She was for single-payer healthcare, now she's against it. She vowed to raise taxes on the wealthy, now she does not.

The last obstacle to Harris winning is Harris herself. We who want her to win have to ask — Which version is going to show up? And what will we do when she does?

YARA NARDI

AMBA GUERGUERIAN

Banlieue pivotal in Left's ups election v

By Amba Guerguerian

PARIS — In the spring of 2023 a protest movement against French President Emmanuel Macron's drive to increase the retirement age from 62 to 64 flooded the country's streets. Workers, from sanitation to railway, to office employees, participated in weeks of strikes. Young antifascists kept Paris and other French cities ablaze for over a month, but this movement lacked widespread participation from the youth — children of immigrants — living in the outskirts of Paris, and Macron prevailed, using a constitutional provision to bypass a vote in the National Assembly.

These same demonstrators rejoiced just over a year later on Sunday, July 7, when the leftist coalition beat Marine Le Pen's far-right and Macron's centrist coalitions in France's snap parliamentary elections.

Macron shocked many in early June when he dissolved the French legislature and called new elections. He hoped to strengthen his party's advantage over the far-right National Rally party and was counting on left parties to remain divided which, in France's two-stage voting process, would push their supporters to vote for centrist candidates in the second round of voting.

Instead, the left quickly united into a four-party alliance, the New Popular Front, and finished a strong second in the first round of the election — trailing the openly fascist National Rally but well ahead of Macron's centrist coalition. In the days that followed, the left and center formed an uneasy alliance with 200 parliamentary candidates from their ranks withdrawing from races in which they had finished in third place in the opening round. This was in order to prevent the far right from gaining a parliamentary majority that would allow them to govern France for the first time since the early 1940s when it collaborated with the Nazi occupation.

The strategy worked spectacularly, with the New Popular Front winning the most deputies (182) in the 577-seat parliament followed by Macron's coalition (168 seats) with National Rally lagging in third (143 seats) after many thought they would win a decisive majority. Compared to the previous 2022 parliamentary elections, the left gained 49 seats, the center lost 82 and the far right gained 54. France Insoumise, the most militant of the four parties in the NPF, also won the most seats of any party in their coalition.

Tens of thousands of New Popular Front supporters who gathered in public squares to watch the election results were stunned by their victory and burst into antifascist chants of "No pasaran!" (They shall not pass!). The New Popular Front drew its inspiration from the Popular Front government of the mid-1930s, a coalition of several socialist parties that passed sweeping social and economic reforms before collapsing in the run-up to World War II.

For the present-day French left, this marked the first time it had won a political battle against Macron since he took office in 2017.

"When we heard the coalition won, I cried. You can't know the joy that there was in Paris. All of Paris shouted. We thought [the far-right] was going to win," said Farida Belabbas, cofounder of La Fleche d'Or, a center for radical culture and politics in Paris.

"Fifty-two percent of the votes for the Popular Front came from the low-income neighborhoods!" boasted a young Arab-French organizer at the Fleche d'Or as she spoke to a roaring crowd just after the election results were announced.

"All the leftists at the Fleche d'Or jumped on their bikes and rushed to Place de la République. There were fireworks. It was great. There was joy! You could see it on everyone's faces. This is history. The people won. We retook the streets. We are reclaiming our power," says Belabbas, the daughter of an Algerian revolutionary who fought in that country's 1954–62 war of independence against France.

The New Popular Front's platform includes lowering the retirement age back down to 60 (where it was before Republican President Nicolas Sarkozy initially raised it in 2010), scrapping Macron's pension re-

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forms, raising the minimum wage by 14%, and freezing the price of basic necessities such as food and fuel. It aims to cover the costs of children's education (including meals, transportation and extracurricular activities). This would all be funded by increasing taxes on the rich.

The front has also promised to recognize Palestine as a state and to push for an arms embargo against Israel.

The New Popular Front — which in addition to the main leftwing and green parties also included the support of several trade-union and antiracist groups — agreed to a single joint slate of candidates going into the first round of the elections, making the French left the strongest and main challenger to the fascists.

The ability of the left-green coalition to prevail in the second round was largely due to the fact that the *banlieue*, the impoverished neighborhoods dotted with large housing blocks on the periphery of Paris, came out to vote in their favor. They did so despite the fact that the *banlieue* is more separated than ever from Paris: "It is now quite difficult to cross the highways and enter or exit the banlieue," said Belabbas. Yet "it's the first time the youth of the banlieue voted! And it was decisive."

It is these mostly non-white people from Paris' low-income neighborhoods that are worst discriminated against by the far right and that have been worst affected my Macron's neoliberal, often anti-democratic reforms. During his presidency, Macron has implemented a little-before-used loophole in the French constitution called 49.3 that enables him to pass through laws without an assembly vote. He used it to push through the retirement reform, to make class sizes bigger in the French education system, to change the law so that only French citizens don't have to pay for health care, to conservatively reform unemployment benefits and to cut taxes on the wealthy.

"We won all of these rights through political struggles, and now he's throwing them away," Belabbas told *The Indypendent*. "The seven years of Macron has profoundly broken France. We're seeing a destruction of the social-welfare state."

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Ahead of the French elections, the New Popular Front was strengthened as its parties and supporters hosted demonstrations in the streets attended by masses — worker, student, pro-immigrant, antiracist and anti-imperialist groups, and anyone else that wanted to defeat the fascists and centrists — as well as by community assemblies and canvassing events.

In the seven days between the first and second round of the elections, not only did people begin to demonstrate every day, but the various leftist factions, led by those from the *banlieue*, made an extra effort to organize and speak to the people living in the low-income parts of Paris.

This was not the first time that those marginalized people — mostly Arab and African immigrants and their children — were facing an election against the far-right, but it was the first time that they came out to vote in such high numbers.

"You cannot underestimate the role Palestine played in the elections," says Belabbas. "The Israeli far right has power in the politics of France. And [Palestine] is an issue that hits straight to the heart for the people in this country coming from the post-colonial world. There are many Algerian descendents in France, and for us Algeriens, Palestine — it's the same fight we fought against France."

The only French party that has spoken against Israel is France Insoumise, and it was part of the coalition that won the most votes, pointed out Belabbas.

Before Macron's June 10 announcement that he would dissolve the French Parliament, triggering snap elections, weekly pro-Palestine protests had already been taking to the streets in cities around the country. After the announcement, those weekly protests grew into pro-New Popular Front demonstrations.

"We wish for a France that is more accepting and more open," said Osama Afaneh, a Palestinian refugee living in France. He wore a red kuffiyeh draped over his shoulders (technically illegal to wear at a political demonstration in France), at a mass protest in Paris on June 15. "This is coming together after weeks and weeks of protest for Palestine. Every Saturday since October we've been protesting," he said.

"I hope we see a more left-wing government in France that does recognize the state of Palestine with the borders from '67," continued Afaneh. "Today is the first time that all the unions are coming together, and a lot of organizations that we have not seen protesting for Palestine in the past weeks are seeing themselves as a part of the leftist movement."

That day hundreds of thousands of protesters demonstrated around the country — 250,000 according to the French police and 640,000 according to the General Confederation of Labor. In Paris, calls for justice in Palestine remained loud among the protesters' demands, and from many parts of the demonstration erupted chants demanding the retirement age be lowered back to 60.

"Retirement! At 60! We fought to win it and we'll fight to keep it!" shouted the Parisians.

"It's a very important moment for democracy in France, because it's very dangerous for a lot of us foreigners coming to live in France," said Afaneh. "I am very hopeful — just seeing today, thousands of people coming together."

After *The Indy* spoke with Afaneh, Omar Talsoumi, the co-founder of a prominent leftist pro-Palestine organization called Urgence Palestine, started giving a speech.

"Is the question we ask ourselves today whether this extraordinary crowd is here because we are sick of our France, sick because we are scared of what France might become?" Talsoumi asked. "Or are we here because already, now, right now … the most indispensable right and the most sacred duty is to rise up against this system?" A roaring cheer came from the crowd well populated by Arab people.

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Ahead of the elections, leftist organizers around France also hurried to put together people's assemblies and other forms of community gatherings where speakers from leftist political parties and groups encouraged attendees not only to vote in the upcoming elections, but to continue to push for their demands through various means of protest.

At an assembly in Paris on June 13, where even the overflow room was so packed that people waited outside to be let in, a speaker from the far-left organization Revolution Permanente encouraged participants to do more than just vote.

"I live in the *banlieue*, and life is hard," she explained, listing hurdles such as the difficulty of finding a good education for her children.

"The minimum thing we can do is vote," she said, "but we also need to form our own parties and have our own demands, and not just demand for reform from politicians. … We need to organize wherever we are — at school, at work, in the neighborhood, on the streets."

Amid the flurry of organizing coming out of the *banlieue* in recent months, a group of young media makers from there has begun to print its own anti-imperialist, independent publication, *nous*. (*us*.). It is a project connected to Paroles d'Honneur (Words of Honor), a political media group founded in 2017 out of the *banlieue* dedicated to a "new perspective on current events by making the voices of post-colonial immigrant neighborhoods heard."

At the protest on July 15, youth sold the second issue of the new 120-page magazine for 10 euros. "Terroriste: C'est celui qui dit qui est!" (Terrorist: Those who say it are it!) was printed on the cover below a photo of a young Arab person wearing a *kuffiyeh* with bombs raining down behind them.

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With France's parliament deeply divided, it remains to be seen what kind of new government will take shape. The New Popular Front holds the most seats but is well short of a majority. Jean-Luc Melénchon, as the leader of the largest party within the leftist coalition, has argued he should be the next prime minister, but the other, more moderate parties in the Front — the Socialists, the Communists and the Greens — have refused to back him.

For the New Popular Front to achieve a majority of votes, it would need support from Macron's centrist coalition. Macron, meanwhile, has other options. On July 18, his coalition got enough support from the far right to re-elect Macron ally Yael Braun-Pivet as speaker of the national assembly over Communist Party Deputy Andre Chassiagne, the candidate of the New Popular Front, by a vote of 220–207.

Meanwhile, support for Melénchon's platform of radical wealth redistribution is running high among the young, multiracial left based in the *banlieue*, which has been re-energized by months of protests and now an election victory.

"We are together! And we continue to construct, day after day, in our neighborhoods, our high schools, our universities, street by street, the anti-colonial and anti-racist front of which France is in need," says Omar Talsoumi.

After Melénchon made a victory speech on the floor of the French Parliament on July 7, he headed to the Stalingrad metro stop, not far from the *banlieue*.

"And who was there?" said Belabbas, "Arabs, Black people, the immigrants. They rejoiced! These people eat sometimes only once a day; their life is hard, you have to understand. I've seen misery on the faces of the young, the old — but this day I saw great joy. They are quite aware that the *banlieue* voted. It's as if a new people of France has been born with the second round of the legislative elections, and they all know it. They won't let it be stolen; they know very well this is just the beginning."

Quotes have been translated to English by the author.

'YOU CANNOT UNDERESTIMATE THE ROLE PALESTINE PLAYED IN THE ELECTIONS.'

VICTORY PARTY: *Supporters of the New Popular Front gather on July 7 at Place Stalingrad in Paris to watch election results.*

DETERMINED: *A supporter of the New Popular Front holds a sign that reads No Pasaran ("They will not pass"), an anti-fascist slogan from the 1930s.*

ABDUL AL-HUSSEINI

CEASE FIRE NOW: *Displaced child Sham al-Hessi, who suffers from a skin disease, sleeps at a makeshift tent camp in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip, July 29.*

Hell on Earth

Polio and skin diseases spread as Israel destroys water tanks and wells

By Amba Guerguerian

At the outset of Israel's genocide in Gaza, health officials and some news outlets warned that the indiscriminate destruction of the Strip, including that of the water systems, would result in outbreaks of disease that would kill more people than the bombs that have now rained down on the walled-off territory since Oct. 7.

The moment has arrived. The Gaza Strip was declared a polio epidemic zone at the end of July after sewage-water samples taken a month earlier by the World Health Organization came back positive.

According to the WHO, only 16 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are somewhat "functional" — in some cases, that means patients are being treated on the hospital floor by health professionals who are overworked and undersupplied. The decimation of the health system via the destruction of its critical infrastructure, mass displacement of people and a shortage of medical supplies has prevented children from receiving many life saving vaccines, such as those against polio.

And skin diseases are spreading even more rapidly than they were up until recent weeks. At the end of July there were around 103,000 reported cases of lice and scabies in Gaza and 65,000 of skin rashes, according to the World Health Organization. And according to the UN Development program, more than one million cases of acute respiratory infections have been recorded since October, along with more than 500,000 of acute diarrhea and more than 100,000 of jaundice.

Such a health disaster was inevitable considering the conditions in the overcrowded tent camps that house hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, where temperatures are unbearably high during the summer, and people don't have access to soap. The sanitation system has collapsed; pools of open sewage lay among the rubble.

Seventy percent of all sewage pumps in Gaza have been destroyed, and not a single wastewater treatment plant is working. A video recorded by an Israeli soldier from the combat engineering corps, tweeted by Palestinian reporter Younis Tirawi on July 26, shows the calculated demolition of a chief water facility in Rafah.

"The Israeli army destroyed more than 40 water holes and put more than 90 out of service. … They also bombed all nine major water tanks," reported Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda in an Instagram video on Aug. 4. "Now, unfortunately, the water share per person in Gaza is only three liters of water for drinking, washing, cleaning and cooking … while the international average is more than 30 liters of water per day."

Khan Younis and nearby Deirf al-Balah (which means "monastery of the date palm" in Arabic and dates back to the 13h century BCE) are where the polio-positive sewage was found. Four days later, Israel bombed a tent camp at the Al-Aqsa Hospital there. "Do you see how we try to put out the fire after the bombing to schools and tents. Do you how much we suffer as we die, as we watch our loved ones die? Do you understand what it means not to have water?," tweeted Palestinian poet Mosab Abu Toha.

The following day, Israel conducted strikes on two United Nations-run schools in the western part of Gaza City. According to the Palestinian Civil Defense in Gaza, 80 percent of the killed and injured in the strikes were children.

"This is the same exact scenario that we've seen in the past few days. What we know for a fact right now is that there is [a] concentration of attacks on evacuation centers," *Al Jazeera*'s Hani Mahmoud said. "The Israeli military is not giving any prior warning to people inside these evacuation centers."

(When the Al-Ahli Hospital was bombed for the first time on Oct. 7, the mainstream Western media covered it, so Israel denied fault, accusing the Palestinian Islamic Jihad of using it as a staging ground for rocket attacks on Israel. Evidence has since come out that it was an American-made missile that struck the hospital. Hospital bombings now receive little to no coverage from Western outlets.)

The official death toll, around 40,000, does not take into account thousands of dead buried under rubble nor the indirect deaths due to destruction of health facilities, food distribution systems and other public infrastructure. Even that number, though, is likely a serious undercount, points out a recent study by the medical journal *Lancet,* because the destruction of infrastructure in Gaza — including the major funding cuts to the UN Relief Work Agency's back in January — has made it extremely difficult to calculate all the "official" deaths.

After applying a "conservative estimate" of four indirect deaths per one direct death, the *Lancet* study found that "it is not implausible to estimate that up to 186,000 or even more" people have been killed in Gaza, or 8% of the pre-October population.

TWO POEMS FROM GAZA

UNTITLED
by Mahmoud Joudah
translated by Mosab Abu Toha

The death of a girl means that a tree in the garden of heart has withered, that a major malfunction has struck the mood of the dawn, and that someone will sleep in an undying eclipse, will not perform his morning practices.

The death of a girl means that a dance has ceased forever, a song has gone astray, a laugh muted after which countless smiles will die out.

The death of a girl means that someone will walk in the streets on his own, eyes welled up, heavy-hearted, and too melancholic and about to weep people think he's bad.

The death of a girl means there is a shortage of food for the impoverished, a raging thirst striking the throats of birds, a summer followed by no winter, and an everlasting arthritis in the joints of Time.

The death of a girl means that a poem will be unwritten, a painting will be unpainted, a love will be orphaned, an embrace will be postponed, and that there will be grief in a present tense that never stops."

• • •

REQUEST LETTER
by Mosab Abu Toha

He penned a quick letter on paper, (a letter as plain in regard to form as possible, with no white spaces) and threw it in the graveyard at night:

Angel of death,
When you collect the souls of those killed in an airstrike, do you mind leaving a sign for us, so we know who is who? Because last time a mother couldn't recognize her daughter's face, which ear or arm or finger on the bloody streets was hers. And a father wouldn't recognize which was his child if it wasn't for the size of shoes (28 European size still on the sole) that he bought her for the new school year.

On the back of the paper, he penned the same letter in Arabic, because who could know what language the angel of death was fluent at, the most spoken language in the world, or the language of God:

الى ملك الموت،
عندما تجمعُ أرواحَ من قتلوا في الغارة الجوية، هل تمانع بان تتركَ إشارةً تدلنا على من هو من؟ لأنه في المرة الماضية لم تستطع أمٌ أن تتعرف على وجه ابنتها، أيّه أذن أو ذراع أو أصبع في الشارع المدميّ كان لابنتها. و كذا أب ام يستطع أن يعرف أية طفلة لولا حجمُ الحذاء (٢٨ بالمقياس الأوروبي كان منقوشا على نعل الحذاء) الذي اشتراه لها للعام الدراسي الجديد.

J.D. Vance's elegy to greed & ambition

Hillbilly Elegy
By J.D. Vance
HarperCollins, 288 pages, 2016

By Ariana Orozco

GAGE SKIDMORE

RUNNING MATE: *Republican vice presidential candidate J. D. Vance speaks with attendees at a conservative conference in Phoenix, Ariz.*

Donald Trump has named Ohio Senator JD Vance as his 2024 running mate. Even more so than former Vice President Mike Pence, the 39-year-old endorses far-right political views, including conspiracies about the 2020 election, opposition to abortion rights and denial of human-related climate change.

Vance was initially part of the "Never Trump" movement in 2016, going so far as to call his now-boss "America's Hitler." Despite his early opposition to Trump's presidency, just a few years later Vance changed his tune and went on to support Trump in his 2020 campaign. The two became even closer in 2022 when Vance successfully courted Trump's endorsement for his Senate race.

This cunning shift in opinion is not unexpected. In his 2016 memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, Vance outlines the only two principles he feels are important: get more money and get more power. This Wolf-of-Wall-Street-type ambition mixed with the book's unflinching portrayals of white Appalachian poverty makes his cozying up to Trump unsurprising.

Hillbilly Elegy is a personal account of Vance's upbringing in Appalachia and offers his opinions on how rural America transitioned from a Democratic bloc to consistently Republican. He criticizes national policies like Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush's perfunctory home-owning legislation for trapping already poor people in a cycle of debt accumulation. However, in addition to the occasional policy analysis, Vance spends the majority of his political tirades railing against individuals themselves, describing the process by which people become reliant on welfare. He posits that, as a result, these people become lazy, self-hating and apathetic — unlike himself, thanks to grandparents who inculcated him with an unflinching work ethic and desire to escape Ohio. It is Influencer Strategy 101: Act like me and have what I have.

Part of the reason that *Hillbilly Elegy* has sold over 1.6 million copies is that Vance's misanthropy is understandable. It is difficult to deny the effectiveness of Vance's vignettes — scenes of his drug-addicted mother, his alcoholic grandfather and the realities of generational poverty seem to establish his authority on the issues of a broken America. In fact, many of his stories are in line with existing literature about poor white people. The chapter in which Vance forgives his mother for her choices bears an uncanny resemblance to a similar scene in the short-story collection *Trash* by Appalachian author Dorothy Allison. In both, the writers buckle to the unbearable trauma caused by their mothers and mother-figures while accepting that they must forgive them to move on with their lives.

What sets Vance apart is not his experiences, but rather his conclusions. Where Allison frees herself from hating her "white trash" upbringing, Vance's book concludes more blistering than it begins; he sinks his teeth into identity politics, claiming that people do not want him to succeed because he is a white man. This fuels much of his rage towards immigrants and minorities. The populist reckoning he begs for is not against billionaires like his backer Peter Thiel. Instead, he seeks to replace America's hillbilly underbelly with a class of Black and Brown people who he believes have received the benefits he deserves.

There are many aspects of Hillbilly Elegy and JDVance which will appeal to potential MAGA supporters. Donald Trump cannot pretend to know what poverty feels like, and certainly not what it feels like to crawl out of it. JD Vance, on the other hand, provides proof that MAGA Republicans can cross over to a white-picket-fence lifestyle. "Believe me," he tells the reader, "I did it."

Vance realizes that the easiest way to escape poverty is to cause it, and gleefully explains how he employed this tactic to ruthlessly climb America's economic ladder. He achieved his personal reckoning by transforming himself from a backwards hillbilly to a spry Silicon Valley tycoon. These men wear pink, date non-white women, and, like the stockbrokers of The Wolf of Wall Street, don't want to be blamed for simply playing the game. Vance is a new type of masculine hero: a guy who views his brain as his greatest asset and wants to slash taxes so he can reap more of the rewards he believes he is entitled to.

Vance straddles the line between red-hot American and neo-conservative yuppie. Like Trump, his true nature is not nearly as important as his ability to dog whistle to various disgruntled groups. For an increasingly rage-driven political system, Vance is the apparent heir to Trump's devoted MAGA following.

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